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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PRESIDENT ATTENDS SEPTEMBER 11 CEREMONY AT
MANAS AIR BASE

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Bakiyev led the Kyrgyz Government delegation to the September 11 ceremony at the Manas Air Base. Bakiyev said that it was symbolic that his first visit to the Base should come on such a momentous day, and he re-affirmed Kyrgyzstan's commitment to the war on terrorism. Both the Ambassador and Base Commander Col. Reese thanked the Kyrgyz Government for its efforts and cooperation in the rescue of Maj. Jill Metzger, who had been abducted in Bishkek September 5. In addition to being a thoughtful remembrance of the victims of September 11, the ceremony had political significance, as the President's participation was an important show of support for the Air Base, and the presence of such a high level delegation represented the President's efforts to show unity from a government that is often fractious. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) President Kurmanbek Bakiyev led a Kyrgyz Government delegation to the Embassy and Base's September 11 commemoration ceremony at the 376th Air Expeditionary Wing, Manas Air Base. The delegation included Prime Minister Felix Kulov, Speaker of Parliament Marat Sultanov, Foreign Minister Alikbek Jekshenkulov, and other senior officials. Also in attendance were invited guests from the religious communities, the diplomatic corps, and local government officials from the area around the Air Base, as well as formations of Spanish, French, Kyrgyz, and American troops.

13. (U) The ceremony included remarks from President Bakiyev, Ambassador Yovanovitch, and Manas Air Base Commander Col. Reese. In addition, the Mufti of the Kyrgyz Republic, Murataly Jumanov, and the Base Chaplain offered prayers. The ceremony concluded with a wreath laying, the playing of taps, and a moment of silence in honor of those who lost their lives on September 11.

14. (U) During his remarks, Bakiyev, who had been Prime Minister at the time of the attack, spoke of his laying

flowers at Ground Zero and of how impressed he had been by the determination of the American people to eliminate terrorism. He noted that the Kyrgyz Government and Parliament had responded quickly to the request to provide territory for the Base. No country can defeat terrorism alone, he said, and Kyrgyzstan, alongside the other CIS countries and countries in the region, would continue to make its contribution to the war on terrorism. He also expressed his appreciation to all those who carry out this war.

¶15. (U) Both the Ambassador and Col. Reese thanked the Kyrgyz government officials for their efforts and cooperation in the rescue of USAF Maj. Jill Metzger, who had been abducted in Bishkek on September 5. The Ambassador noted that while terrorists use their perverted ideology to divide us, much more unites us than divides us -- our common humanity, our commitment to justice, and our choice for freedom over tyranny.

¶16. (U) Following the ceremony, Bakiyev, Kulov, and the rest of the delegation were given a tour of the Base facilities, including the accommodations, dining hall, medical unit, and gymnasium. They also witnessed a military police dog demonstration. Following the tour, Bakiyev gave an impromptu press conference at which he remarked how impressed he was by the living conditions, organization, and efficiency of the Base. Bakiyev also noted that this was the first visit to the Base for him, Prime Minister Kulov and Speaker Sultanov, and it was "symbolic" that it should come on such a momentous day. Kyrgyzstan, he said, was determined to continue its support for the war on terrorism. The Base had already contributed much to achieving stability in Afghanistan, and the situation there is better than it was in 2001, but more still remained to be done.

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¶17. (U) In addition to the Base ceremony, Post sponsored a civilian-oriented September 11 event based around the visiting Citizen Dialogue tour. The two tour participants -- both women, a student and professional -- were the key speakers at a standing-room-only September 11 forum hosted by the Islamic University. Surrounded by copies of the front pages of both international and U.S. papers from September 11, 2001, the speakers discussed the integration of American Muslims into American society. Audience questions focused on practical aspects of Muslim life in America. The event was covered by camera crews from local and national channels.

¶18. (SBU) COMMENT: In addition to being a thoughtful and moving remembrance of the victims of September 11, the ceremony had political significance. The participation of President Bakiyev, and the presence of such a high level Kyrgyz Government delegation, represented an important show of support for the coalition Air Base. Following months of negotiations over the status of the Base, the President's public statements were a welcome expression of Kyrgyz commitment to the partnership. However, given the President's desire to balance competing interests, this commitment is not fixed. Following a very difficult summer, the President's participation in the ceremony also represented a step forward in the bilateral relationship. Interestingly, the presence of the large Kyrgyz delegation also represented Bakiyev's attempt to demonstrate unity from a government in which the president and prime minister often do not get along, but it is clear that those relations are still strained. END COMMENT.
YOVANOVITCH